

PREGNANCY AND BIRTH

- 843 The villagers believe that pregnancy lasts ten lunar months and is signalled by the initial interruption of the menstrual cycle. It is rare for a village woman to see a doctor at all during her pregnancy. The villagers consider it unnecessary and say that only the rich people go to a doctor. Even though there is a government-run health center in the Hsiang which offers some pre-natal care, modesty prevents village women from visiting the clinic although the excuse they give is that they do not have the time.

[759]
[743]
[292] The expectant mother receives no special care during pregnancy: she eats no special foods and goes about her household and field tasks as usual. The women fear that if they eat special foods the baby may get too big and that the delivery will be difficult and dangerous. They wear no special maternity clothes, but wear either larger and fuller skirts or leave the top buttons of their regular skirts open. During the last month of pregnancy and the first month and a half after the birth, the parents abstain from sexual intercourse. This, the villagers explain, is for the protection of the mother's health.

844
759
178 Today, most village women employ a midwife at the birth of their first child. Midwives first began to be used about twenty years ago, but "then it was only rich people." The regular use of a midwife by ordinary villagers has been common only since the postwar period or the late 1940's. It is interesting that one of the important advantages of having a midwife, according to a group of village women, is that "If we call a midwife, it is easier to register the baby in the Hsiang Public Office since the midwife will then write out the certificate of birth. Otherwise a birth certificate must be obtained through the village mayor."

[217] Previously, the older women of the family delivered all babies. Today, these same women may be present to assist the midwife at the time a first child is born, and they usually assist in the delivery of subsequent children when a midwife has not been called. The husband is not present when his wife gives birth.

844
759
465 The midwife who works at the Pu Yen Hsiang Health Center is usually called to Hsin Hsiang village. She has been trained by attending several classes for midwives. "She charges NT \$30-40 (about US \$1) for a normal delivery, or more if she has to give an injection to stop excessive bleeding." The midwife makes two house visits, one at the time of the birth and the second when she washes the baby on the third day after the birth. When the child is born, the midwife applies a silver nitrate solution to the eyes only if it appears that there might be something wrong.

[759]

846 neighbors, or friends in the agricultural slack season or, if she can
612 afford it, a hired woman from Hsin Hsing or another village to come
daily to do the heavy household work. However, it is not at all un-
usual for the new mother to begin to do heavy housework within a
week after giving birth. It is interesting to note that *ch'in ch'i* relatives
rarely, if ever, come to help the woman with her household tasks.

846 During the first month after the birth, the new mother may not go
784 outside of the house between sunset and sunrise "because she will
make heaven and earth dirty, and because she is also afraid of devils at
night." This belief is said to be quite widespread throughout the local
area and even in nearby towns. The prohibition also applies to the
woman's laundered clothing, which must be taken inside the house by
sunset even if still wet. If the new mother were to show herself or her
clothing outside the house at night, the next child born to her might
be abnormal—a "devil baby" or a "dirty baby."

843 According to the villagers, such devil babies may also be born under
845 other circumstances. For example, "stubborn people or those who do
784 not believe or follow traditions can have a devil baby." In one case of
such a birth, a woman's husband had insisted on building their house
on a spot which the geomancer had deemed unsuitable. The birth of
an abnormal child may be brought about by other actions as well: the
villagers believe that if a woman is pregnant neither she nor anyone
near her should cut things, bang nails with a hammer, or bore holes. If
either of the latter acts is performed, the baby may be born with a hole
in its head. If one cuts such things as cloth, the baby may be born with
a cleft palate. Once when a pregnant woman in Hsin Hsing passed
under a bamboo tree which someone was cutting down, she "gave
birth to a baby with a deep opening in its head so that one could see
the brains. The baby died." The explanations are obviously rational-
izations for birth abnormalities and, at the same time, tend to rein-
force social conformity and the maintenance of the traditional beliefs
and customs.

846 On the third and the twelfth days after birth of the child, the
782 husband's family offers their ancestors and the gods fried glutinous
rice. This ceremony is held more frequently for boys than girls. When
the baby is a month old the family again worships, this time offering
dough cakes as sacrifices.

553 On the ninth day after birth the infant is given a name. In Hsin
Hsing this is usually done by the older members of the patrilineal
family such as the grandparents. According to several villagers, the
given name must not be the same as that of any living relative or
friend of the family, as it would be disrespectful to the older person.

In typical Chinese fashion, it is common in Hsin Hsing and the
surrounding area for the first character of the given name to be the
same for all children of the same generation in a single *tsu*, or at least

744 plain water, few boil it the full ten minutes. There is no question about what is proper but people just do not want to take the time or trouble and a few say that it would cost too much for the fuel to boil all drinking water a full ten minutes. Similarly, mosquito nets are not kept in good repair although infected bites are common.

356 Houses are quite messy and dirty. People will clean them as required to pass government inspection, but grudgingly. There are two values operating against cleanliness. A cluttered house is a sign of wealth or economic wellbeing. Also, a baby god is thought to hide somewhere in the room of a pregnant woman during the period from conception to birth. Disturbing his resting place may have serious detrimental effects on the baby. Since a woman is not likely to know the moment she becomes pregnant, the bedrooms are often neglected in cleaning. The fastidious Japanese also worked hard in T'aipei Li at promoting clean houses with little success.

262 Food handling techniques are comparatively good.
251 No raw foods other than fruits with a thick skin such as
744 citrus or bananas are consumed. Almost every family now covers left-over foods with a round wooden basket with a screened top to keep out insects in accordance with suggestions of the farmers' association and government health agents. This is a new practice instituted during the last

842 Almost everyone agrees that a couple should have the first child as soon after marriage as possible and I found no married childless couples employing birth control measures. It is proper to continue having children until the first grand-child is born. Although it is expected that 833 842 intercourse will continue as long as physically possible, a couple who continues to have children after they have become grandparents will experience much ridicule.

Pregnancy and Birth

- 843 844 Pregnancy and birth are periods of anxiety in every society for they are physically dangerous for mother and child alike since either may die. There may be a spontaneous abortion or defective children may be born. Consequently, almost everywhere, special ritual is required with respect to various aspects of the period of pregnancy.

Seemingly, in Sanlei, some of the ritual or belief is supported by modern medical discoveries, i.e., certain food requirements such as increased consumption of meat and eggs for expectant mothers is medically sound. The origins of other customs are lost in antiquity. It has been posited in another context that certain proximate events were often interpreted to have spurious causal connections (Carroll, 1963:5). In any case, there is a great host of Chinese beliefs connected with pregnancy and birth with attendant rituals and avoidances which are exceeded in number only by those related to death.

- * 843 For just about every other event in village requiring
562 religious-magical activities, men predominate in their performance. It appears that women may worship individually more often than men, but if an activity is required rather than voluntary, men usually perform it. Women are dominant only in religious activities which focus on pregnancy and childbirth. Before birth, the only requirement for men is continuance of sustenance responsibilities, tendency to indulge his wife's whims (particularly food cravings), and sexual abstinence during the last month of the pregnancy.
- 846 He has responsibility after birth for a month's continued sexual abstinence and joint participation in naming, celebrating, and introducing the child. The expectant father has no requirements regarding food or ritual which are the equivalents of those for his wife.
- 843

The delayed onset of the menstrual period marks the beginning of pregnancy. Almost all women state pregnancy is accompanied by a craving for odd foods which comes and goes all during pregnancy. Most of the foods are not very expensive but are unusual or out of season. Morning sickness is fairly common but only present in a minority of cases. Aside from certain forbidden activities, morning sickness or pregnancy in general is not expected to interfere with a woman's daily activities and hard work. Work continues right up until near parturition for everyone agrees that hard work, particularly many walks up into the mountains, will make parturition easier.

- 843 The husband usually is told matter of factly as soon as the wife suspects she is pregnant for only wives keep track of the menstrual cycle. Outside the immediate household, others are not normally told until the woman starts to show but since social relations are so intimate, word soon gets around. Outsiders are really curious only about brides but only old women in the village ask brides openly, usually accompanied with a cackle and slapped knee, "Are you pregnant yet?" The girls never answer and are greatly embarrassed while older people laugh openly and younger ones smile. From older women, the expectant mother learns what should be done, what is good to eat, what food and activities to avoid, etc.

[782] The pregnant girl may have prayed to a particular god or a variety of gods for assistance in becoming pregnant so the answer to the prayer should be recognized with rich food sacrifices. Rarely does anyone regret a pregnancy.

843 There are many taboos for a pregnant woman such as
776 the set which derives from the belief in Tai Shen, the god of the pregnant womb. As soon as a woman becomes pregnant, Tai Shen enters her room and hides somewhere, under the bed, in a chair, on a picture on the wall, etc. If he is disturbed, he may harm the baby, possibly causing an abortion. Thus, it is necessary to keep the bedroom undisturbed all
[356] during pregnancy. The belief prevents sweeping and cleaning

- 843 and moreover, since a woman typically is pregnant for a
776
775
774 period of time before becoming aware, the bedrooms of po-
tentially fertile women are seldom cleaned. The only truly
safe period is 30 days after a child is born, the morning
before intercourse is resumed. If Tai Shen is inadvertent-
ly offended, which can be detected through a sharp pain
in the abdomen at the time of the disturbing activity, it
844 is necessary to call in a shaman to pacify him. Because
776 of Tai Shen it is necessary that parturition take place
in the regular bedroom.

778 An interesting change in this belief about Tai Shen
844 is related to modern medical practices emanating out of a
776
775 small public hospital in Hsin Tien which provides a doctor
for child birth. The mines provide the families of workers
with medical insurance and many miner's wives are therefore
having babies in the hospital, fairly common in Erhlei but
still rare in Sanlei. Twenty years ago, it was impossible
to discover the hiding place of Tai Shen but today, reli-
gious specialists are able to detect his hiding place so
the object in which he is hiding can be taken to the hos-
pital in Hsin Tien with the woman in labor.

- 843 There is a whole host of other taboos for the preg-
nant woman: tying strings in her bedroom will effect the
baby's fingers; using scissors, the ears; needles, the eyes,
etc. Funerals are likely to cause miscarriages. Wedding
ceremonies are also off limits because the belief in hai

- 843 chung hsi (good counteracts good) means that either the mother or the newlyweds will likely suffer harm. There are many other such strictures but almost any lapses may be counteracted by the activities of a shaman.

[842] As previously stated, it is hoped the first child will be a boy and boys will continue to be desired following the first child until the desired number is acquired. There are rituals to change the sex of the unborn child from female to male, some performed by the family and others by specialists, but villagers do not believe them very effective. It is also possible to detect the sex by various means such as computations involving the mother's age and month of conception.

- 844 Most births in the village are attended by a local unlicensed midwife with the assistance of a few older women while men are excluded. A woman should not make much noise during birth as everyone lives crowded together and loud crying or screaming would be disturbing. Herbs have been consumed monthly commencing the third month with more added as the expected delivery date nears. Women give birth while lying down on their backs.
- [843]

The new baby is wiped with sesame oil and a cloth soaked in salt water is used to clean his mouth followed by sugar water. Eye drops are irregularly used, increasing now in frequency but still only half the time for they cost extra. The baby is wrapped in a cloth and placed next to